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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [EAID](#) [EAGR](#) [PREL](#) [ET](#)
SUBJECT: OGADEN: MIXED HUMANITARIAN ACCESS, LOOMING DROUGHT
RISKS EMERGENCY

REF: A. ADDIS 1259
[B](#). ADDIS 1223
[C](#). ADDIS 1204

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (SBU) In a May 9 roundtable discussion with donors, NGOs expressed concern over the overwhelming inadequacy of the Ethiopian Government (GoE)'s humanitarian appeal to respond to current drought conditions in Ethiopia and detailed persistent bureaucratic impediments to their ability to provide humanitarian assistance to drought and conflict-affected areas of the Ogaden. After two years of persistent vulnerability, the people of the Ogaden face depleted resiliency to cope with the current shock. While GoE access restrictions have effectively blocked donors' and NGOs' ability to assess the severity of the drought in the Ogaden, the GoE's appeal for humanitarian assistance fundamentally underestimates the magnitude of humanitarian needs in some regions and excludes other affected regions altogether. Despite receiving greater GoE authorization to access, and deliver relief food and medical supplies throughout the Ogaden, NGOs reported extensive and lengthy bureaucratic requirements that severely constrain their ability to fulfill their obligations to donor partners. Without a more accurate drought response appeal by the GoE and significantly facilitated NGO access procedures, huge numbers of Ethiopia's most vulnerable could face still greater malnutrition, morbidity, and mortality. Although Ambassador raised these concerns to Prime Minister Meles on May 9 (Ref A) along with the UK and French Ambassadors, it remains evident that without a significant and sustained push the GoE will maintain its current hostile approach to NGOs at the expense of its own citizens. Post encourages Washington bureaus and agencies to raise USG concerns about NGO access impediments and the inadequacy of the GoE's humanitarian appeal with the Ethiopian Ambassador when he is called in to discuss the draft Civil Society law (Ref B). End Summary.

DROUGHT

[1](#)2. (SBU) Although Post has reported (Ref C) on the general drought conditions facing Ethiopia, NGOs noted that without greater operational access they cannot assess whether the drought caused by the already largely-failed Belg rains combined with the poor Meher forecast will be worse than the major drought of 2002. The International Rescue Committee (IRC), which does currently enjoy relatively good access in the Ogaden, argued that conditions in the Somali region are

looking worse than 2002. The UN Office of the Coordinator for Humanitarian Assistance (OCHA), however, argued that it is not yet clear that the drought in Somali region would be as bad as 2002. OCHA did, however, stress that two years of failed rains and poor harvests have so depleted the resiliency of the local population of the Somali region that the onset of drought has brought on almost instantaneous physical impacts in child morbidity/mortality and malnutrition, and we should only expect to see greater humanitarian impacts as the drought progresses. While Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF)-Greece reported severe acute malnutrition (SAM) rates of 10 percent in some locales, MSF-Holland noted that it cannot adequately assess, or respond to, humanitarian needs in the Ogaden due to GoE restrictions on their access and operations. USAID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) representative emphasized the critical need for an unbiased nutritional assessment in the Ogaden. MSF-Switzerland reported that a significant portion of humanitarian food delivered to rural areas of the Ogaden has been confiscated by the military and local authorities and sold to traders from Somaliland, thus further restricting the portion of relief food actually reaching intended beneficiaries. MSF-Holland argued that without improved access, the MSFs in Ethiopia may be forced to withdraw.

13. (SBU) Several NGOs emphasized that the rhetoric and scope of humanitarian needs captured in the GoE's appeal do not match the ground truth in many parts of Ethiopia. While IRC stressed that the drought has had a major toll on the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and People's Region (SNNPR),

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which is highlighted in the GoE's appeal, Catholic Relief Services (CRS) flagged that the Amhara region is completely excluded from the appeal despite the emergence of drought-induced stress migration and kids dropping out of school. The UN's OCHA representative noted that drought conditions and humanitarian needs in Oromiya and SNNPR are not even close to being adequately reflected in the GoE's appeal. Despite the circumstantial evidence of the impacts from the drought, there is still no formal comprehensive assessment. The Disaster Preparedness and Prevention Agency (DPPA) told the Japanese Ambassador that it will do drought impact assessment at the end of June upon the completion of the Belg harvest to determine the actual extent of drought impacts.

BUREAUCRATIC HURDLES FOR NGOS

14. (SBU) While the overt preclusion on NGO (and donor) access to conflicted-affected areas of the Ogaden has been eased notably since the Fall, many NGOs reported a sustained lack of de facto access to much of the Ogaden due to bureaucratic impediments. The IRC noted that it currently enjoys much better access to the region, but must first acquire written permission from the Somali regional president for each trip. Such permission can take weeks. A representative from the European Commission Directorate General for Humanitarian Aid (ECHO) reported being denied access outside of Kebri Dehar while accompanying an EC-funded relief NGO. While MSF-Greece noted that UN agencies enjoy better access than NGOs, a representative from OCHA clarified that the UN is operating in the Ogaden without written authority from the GoE to implement activities, only a verbal assurance of authorization from the Deputy Prime Minister, which could be stripped at will.

15. (SBU) MSF-Greece argued that it enjoys full support from regional authorities in Oromiya and Somali regions to operate, but is stymied by impediments at the federal level. While the GoE has long maintained loose operating procedures for expatriate staff of humanitarian NGOs, it has now chosen to exploit this inconsistency with the law to block expatriate workers from operating in the Ogaden. Instead,

now, expatriates must be registered with DPPA and hold valid work permits, otherwise they are considered "illegal." For instance, DPPA sent a letter to Medecins du Monde (MDM) on April 24 naming seven expatriate employees working without work permits. DPPA ordered MDM to withdraw these employees, "pay back the benefits illegally effected to them," and terminate their employment by April 30. MDM was also ordered to "assure in writing that (it) will never repeat such illegal action and will work in line with the General Guideline for NGO Operation in Ethiopia here after." While the French Ambassador and some NGOs reported that obtaining a work permit for expatriate staffmembers is now taking four-to-six months, MSF-Greece noted that DPPA is not even accepting work permit requests any more. One NGO stressed that the persistent pattern of GoE allegations against local staff in the Ogaden means that NGOs cannot leave local staff on the ground without expatriates without exposing the local staff to significant risk from the GoE. The Japanese Ambassador cited a conversation with DPPA head Ato Simon in which DPPA argued that is only has a problem with four-to-five NGOs, and is willing to authorize the rest of the 47 NGOs interested in working in the Ogaden. DPPA noted, however, that it would only issue two-to-three permits per NGO, after they submit a CV for the staff and a scope of work, which no NGO has yet provided.

MESSAGE TO THE GOVERNMENT

¶6. (SBU) Following the roundtable, Ambassador Yamamoto facilitated a discussion among the donors (U.S., UK, France, Canada, Netherlands, Sweden, Japan, the EC, and the UN) on raising these concerns with the GoE. The U.S., UK, and French Ambassadors agreed to raise these concerns with Prime Minister Meles (Ref A). The donors also agreed to encourage their capitals to stress concerns about these persistent restrictions on humanitarian access with the Ethiopian Ambassadors accredited to their countries when they call the Ambassadors in to express concern about the draft civil

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society organization law (Ref B) introduced on May 2.

¶7. (SBU) Ambassador Yamamoto distributed the following talking points to the assembled donors as a foundation for discussing NGO access concerns. Post encourages Washington bureaus and agencies to draw from these points to raise USG concerns to the Ethiopian Ambassador:

--Delayed rains and the onset of drought-like conditions in areas of the Somali region are exacerbating the already depleted humanitarian conditions stemming from poor rains and harvests over the past two years,

--While there has been a significant increase in access for humanitarian partners throughout the region over the past few months, continued restrictions on movement of humanitarian relief supplies and assistance in response to security conditions and counter-insurgency operations are impeding the provision of food, medical supplies, and water to civilians located in small villages and off of the main roads,

--We, Ethiopia's partners in development, are committed to help address the humanitarian toll of these conditions, but slow logistics and impediments to access are preventing our ability to adequately assess needs and reach beneficiaries,

--Poor coordination among national and local authorities and between relief and security sectors significantly impede a large portion of relief from reaching intended beneficiaries,

--Bureaucratic delays or requirements (from registration of particular staff members to oft-postponed meetings to obtain access permission letters) further delay the delivery of needed food and supplies to Ethiopian civilians,

--The delays in deploying mandatory escort convoys and poor logistics leave already scarce food, medical supplies, and technical personnel idle for days or weeks while civilians continue to go without,

--While the government confirms its commitment to address these humanitarian concerns, photos of emaciated children and animals are beginning to emerge and it is only a matter of time before our governments begin to question the motives behind these delays,

--It is growing increasingly difficult to justify to our capitals the demand for additional assistance for Ethiopia when existing obstacles severely limit the delivery of currently available assistance to beneficiaries,

--It is now evident that the Ethiopian government must establish clear and specific requirements and procedures to ensure that humanitarian implementing partners have expeditious and unimpeded access to the civilians in need of relief,

--It is also critical for medical and nutritional assessment teams to have thorough access to the region to determine the scope and gravity of potential needs,

--Implementing partners' collaboration with anti-peace elements would be unacceptable. At the same time, humanitarian partners' travels in remote areas to respond to humanitarian needs may lead them to encounter anti-peace elements. Reporting details of such encounters to government and security officials only risks exposing them to hostility when they encounter such groups in the future. As such, we encourage the government to acknowledge that such contacts may occur and not use such unwillful contacts as grounds for restricting NGO movements or operations.

COMMENT

18. (SBU) One year into its counter-insurgency efforts in the Ogaden, it is clear that the GoE continues to severely restrict NGOs, particularly the vocal ones, to impede them from fully observing conditions on the ground or fully responding to the humanitarian needs of local populations suspected of favoring insurgents over the government. The

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successful deployment of the Humanitarian Assistance Team and openings in commercial and humanitarian access in Fall 2007 are evidence of the effect of sustained and concerted pressure on the GoE to mitigate the humanitarian needs of its population. While there has been notable progress, the task is not done, concerns are not abated, and the expansion of the drought only exacerbates the vulnerability of the people of the Ogaden. Similarly, nationalism and pride provide an incentive within the GoE to minimize humanitarian needs as evidenced by the GoE's initially inadequate humanitarian appeal in response to the drought and as could be factored into the DPPA's late-June post-Belg drought impact assessment. Post encourages Washington bureaus and agencies to raise USG concerns about NGO access impediments and the adequacy of the GoE's humanitarian appeal with the Ethiopian Ambassador when he is called in to raise the points in Ref C.

End Comment
YAMAMOTO